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ABSTRACT

This action research project sought to increase motivation in second- and fourth-grade students in an urban Midwestern school. Achievement and skill measures as well as observations indicated a lack of student participation and interest. Three areas of intervention were implemented: cross-curricular activities to heighten student interest, cooperative learning strategies to promote participation and interaction, and teacher-designed activities that focused on goal-setting and personal reflection. Follow-up data indicated that active student participation increased, parent and student attitudes toward school and learning became more positive, and students experienced academic success by meeting personal goals and increasing their core of known words for reading and writing. (Eleven appendices include surveys, checklists, goal-setting and progress sheets, instructional sheets, and a parent letter. Contains 30 references.) (EV)

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INCREASING STUDENT MOTIVATION THROUGH THE USE OF INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: Increasing Student Motivation Through the Use of Instructional Strategies
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This study describes a program designed to increase student motivation in targeted elementary classes. The population consisted of second and fourth grade students in an urban community in the Midwest. The problem of academic deficiency was addressed through the administration of timed writings, establishing individual cores of known words, which document progress and achievement. Researchers implemented an observation checklist to measure student participation and a basic skills rubric to monitor progress in spelling and writing.

Analysis of probable causes was evidenced by teachers' observations of a lack of participation in the classroom as well as a low level of student interest. Concern about transfer of weekly spelling list words to daily writing was also a factor in determining the researchers' course in this study.

A review of solution strategies suggested by cited authors, combined with the analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three areas of intervention. Researchers chose cross-curricular activities to heighten student interest, cooperative learning strategies to promote participation and interaction, and teacher designed activities that focus on goal setting and personal reflection.

Data collected from the project showed that active student participation in the classroom increased. Parent and student attitudes toward school and learning became more positive. Academically, students experienced success by meeting personal goals and increasing their core of known words for reading and writing.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The students of the targeted elementary classes demonstrated a lack of motivation, which interfered with their academic growth. Evidence for the existence of the problem included observation checklists, teacher journal entries, and assessments.

Immediate Problem Context

The targeted elementary school was the only school in the district. It had a total population of 727 students ranging from preschool through eighth grade. The racial and ethnic make-up of this population was White 79%, Black 4%, Hispanic 16%, Asian 0.1%, and Native American 0.7%. The school population included 36% low-income families, and 241 students received free or reduced lunch. The district had a 95% attendance rate, with 1% of the student population chronically truant, and an 18% mobility rate among families in this district. The district operating expenditure per pupil was $5,079, and the average class size was 23.

The targeted school consisted of 49 teachers with an average teaching experience of 16 years. The percentage of teachers with a master's degree was 20%. The average teacher's salary was $36,284 with a pupil to teacher ratio of 18:1.

The district had a full time librarian, three custodians, one maintenance person, one speech and language clinician, one counselor, and a full-time nurse. Specialists were provided for art, music, band, physical education, and computer instruction. An elementary principal, a junior high principal, a superintendent, three secretaries, one part-time psychologist, one part time social worker, one cafeteria manager, and ten cafeteria workers were also housed in the district.

The targeted school was constructed in 1952 as an elementary building and named after the district superintendent. The middle school wing was added in the early sixties. The structure housed 50 classrooms on one level. In addition to the classrooms, there were two gymnasiums, two computer labs, a cafeteria, library, conference room, home economics kitchen and sewing room, industrial arts area, a band room, a general music room, and an early childhood education room. The building housed three district administrators in separate offices.

Students received instruction in art, music, and physical education from teachers who specialized in these areas. Extracurricular activities were provided that included band, chorus, drama club, cheerleading, and teams for basketball, volleyball, golf, and track. At-risk programs began at the pre-school level and continued with elementary Title I programs in Reading Recovery, reading, and math. Summer school was offered to Title I students. Fifth graders participated in the Drug and Alcohol Resistance Program (DARE) program, and a certified teacher was provided to tutor middle-school students at risk of failing a subject. Special Education classes offered multi-categorical classrooms, as well as resource rooms for students identified with learning disabilities and behavioral disorders. Students with speech and language difficulties were

screened and assisted by specialists. A class for the visually impaired from the local area was housed in this building, and some students were mainstreamed. Middle school students followed a block schedule and were offered exploratory classes to develop career interests. Life skills and industrial art classes were part of the curriculum, and a student council was elected for students in sixth through eighth grade. The local YMCA offered before and after school child care in the building. A formal parent group organized volunteers each year and raised funds to supply the school with classroom VCRs, reward parties, student supplies and playground equipment.

The targeted school faced several areas of concern. Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) trends were utilized to establish curriculum improvement goals. School safety was addressed with the addition of a police liaison officer on campus, and school board members addressed facility concerns with the development of a building expansion plan.

The Surrounding Community

The targeted school was located in a midwestern city of 7,000, which was part of a large metropolitan area with a population of 400,000 people. The community began as a railroad centered community once housing the largest locomotive repair shop in the world. In 1906, it was incorporated and the first school was built. This school became the first in the state to provide a cafeteria, offer textbook rental, and establish a library with a certified librarian.

The community was nicknamed the City of Progress, and attracted industry because of its access to all modes of transportation. It was located on a major river and was crossed by three interstate highways, and served by several airlines. The

community included 180 small businesses, a hospital, police department, volunteer fire department, six parks, one of which was named a national monument, and a library. In 1998, 450 acres of land were annexed for a PGA golf course where national tournaments were held.

The median household income was $27,500, with a median housing value of $60,000. There was a 15% poverty level, and low-income housing was available. The community's racial ethnic background was White 85%, Hispanic 12%, Black 2%, and other 1%.

National Context of the Problem

Teachers have long been aware that motivation is at the core of many of the pervasive problems of teaching young students. Teachers ranked motivating students as one of their main concerns (Veenman,1984). The value teachers placed on motivation was supported by an extensive amount of research showing the link between motivation and achievement (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni,1996). These studies clearly show the need for teachers to increase their understanding of how students acquire the motivation to develop into active, engaged learners (Gambrell, 1996).

Silva and Weinberg (1984) described motivation as an internal state that arouses, directs, and maintains behavior. More specifically it is the direction and intensity of students' behavior related to their level of activity. Motivational range has been defined as having intrinsic and extrinsic sides. Deci and his colleagues (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991) described intrinsic motivation as goals which are internal to the learner and spring from personal interests and experiences. Fulton (1997)

described extrinsic motivation as accomplishing the goals set by others to receive the desired reward. Ideally, students able to balance the intrinsic and extrinsic sides of motivation become active problem solvers. Unmotivated students are not active; they have missed the connection between effort and outcome (Rimm, 1997). In the student's view, effort does not pay. They have not learned about hard work.

A five-minute segment on a national morning television program described an underachievement epidemic. The segment initiated 20,000 calls and 5,000 letters from interested viewers, confirming the problem (Rimm, 1997). Advertisements aired across the country appealed to frustrated parents who searched for ways to motivate their children to make better grades. Home study courses, family kits, parent training, and videos were available. The interest generated by this subject represents the existence of nation-wide concern regarding underachievement of today's children.

Educational researchers across the country have been studying student motivation and seeking effective strategies to increase students' efforts to learn. Children from all income levels have been affected. Many fourth graders are already performing lower than the national achievement levels in the U.S. and competing countries (Carnegie Corporation, 1996). According to Maehr and Anderman (1993), many school reports have revealed an increase in negative trends in students' willingness to take on academic challenges, their interest in learning, and their feelings of competence.

The way students are directed by teachers and society affects their personal levels of expectation, degree of performance, and desire to participate. Educators can make a difference. Teachers who utilize effective motivational strategies provide

students with opportunities to find their balance and become active learners who grow and succeed academically and in life.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to demonstrate how the lack of student motivation interfered with the academic growth of the targeted second and fourth grade students, researchers administered student and parent surveys. Positive and negative attitudes toward school and student performance in language arts subject areas were measured. A written assessment was given to establish each student's core of known words for writing. Researchers recorded observations of student behavior during class activities to measure involvement.

Student surveys were administered during the first week of data collection. The researchers developed the survey to assess each student's personal view of their capabilities and feelings toward school and schoolwork (Appendix A). Teachers explained and read each item to the class allowing time for individual responses. Seventeen targeted second graders and 24 targeted fourth graders completed the surveys. Figures 1 and 2 display the results.

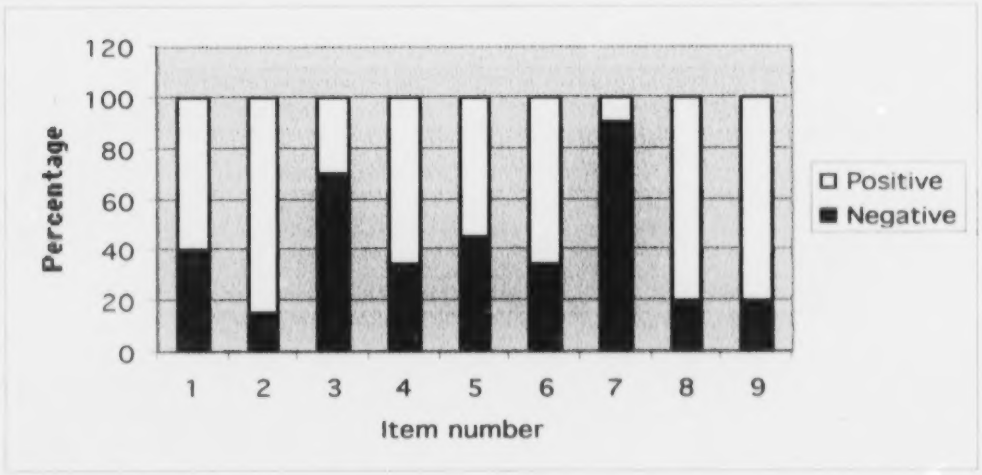

Figure 1. Student responses from Grade 2 indicating personal views on school and learning capabilities.

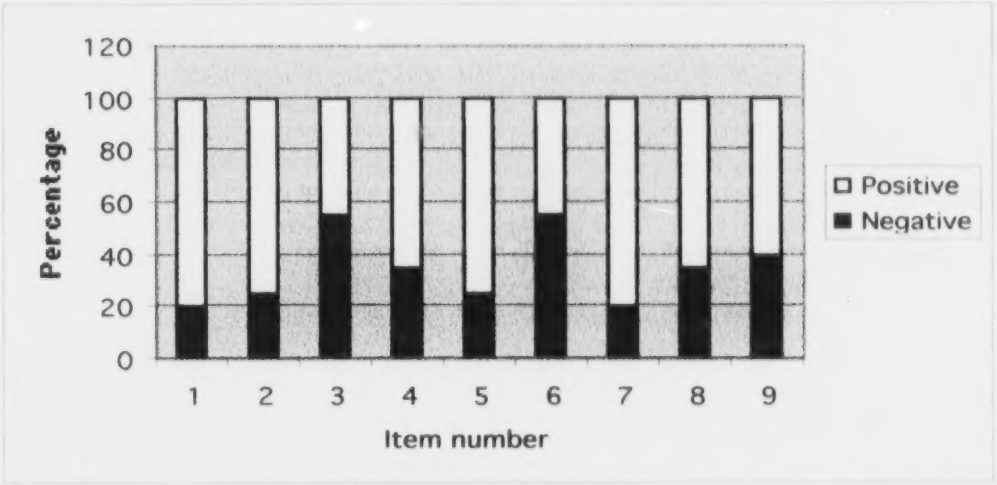

Figure 2. Student responses from Grade 4 indicating personal views on school and learning capabilities.

Survey results from Figure 1 indicated second graders had more positive than negative feelings about school and their own learning capabilities. The majority of students felt others viewed their reading ability positively. They were confident about their ability to answer questions in school and were not concerned with others' opinions of their grades in the classroom. Most students liked to read books. They felt good about their own reading and spelling abilities and viewed learning as important. Negative feelings were revealed about spending time at school and comparing their reading ability to that of their friends.

Overall, results of fourth grade students revealed more positive than negative feelings toward school and their learning capabilities, as shown in Figure 2. Most students liked to read books and viewed their own reading and spelling abilities positively. They felt learning was important and valued time spent at school. Students were not overly concerned with others' opinions of their grades. Negative opinions were expressed about their ability to answer questions in school and comparison of their reading ability to that of their friends.

Parent surveys were distributed during the second week of data collection. At Open House, parents completed the surveys, and additional surveys were sent to parents not in attendance. The researchers developed the survey to assess the parents' perception of their child's academic abilities and attitudes (Appendix B). Teachers informed the parents of the purpose for the information. Eight second grade parents and twenty-four fourth grade parents of the targeted classrooms responded. Figures 3 and 4 display the results.

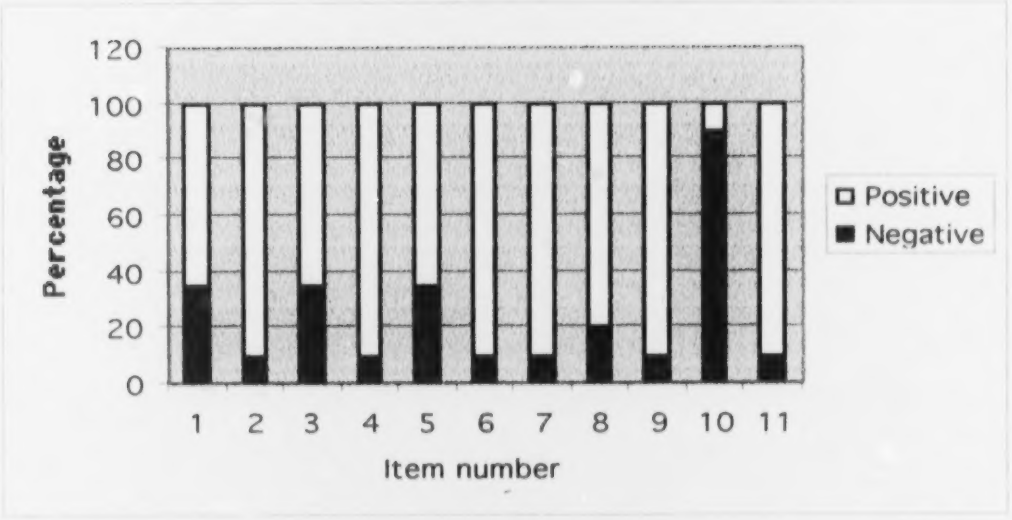

Figure 3. Parent responses indicating opinions of attitudes and abilities of their 2nd grade students.

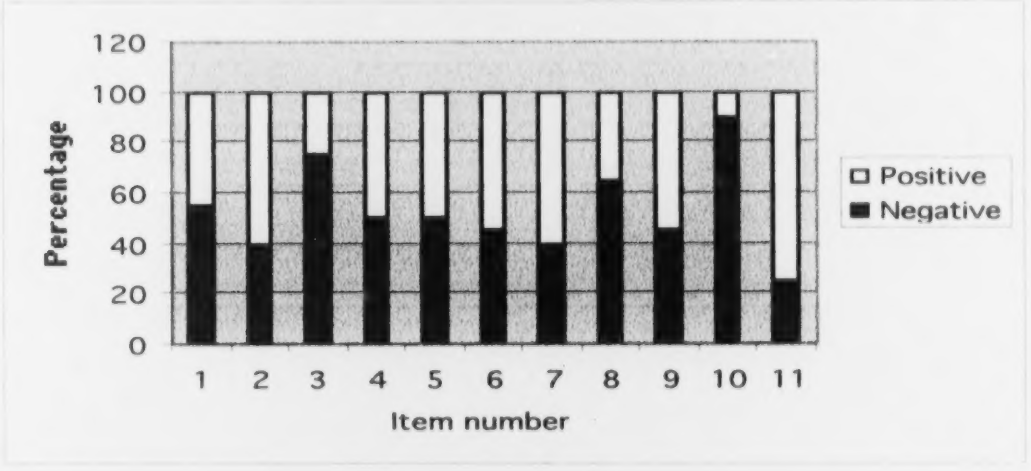

Figure 4. Parent responses indicating opinions of attitudes and abilities of their 4th grade students.

Parent survey responses of second grade students were overall positive. Most parents viewed their child as a good reader, writer, and speller. Parents thought their children valued learning, homework, and time spent at school, and their only concern was that their children did not often talk about school, as is indicated in item 10 of Figure 3.

Survey responses of fourth grade parents were slightly more positive than negative. Parents felt their children valued learning and spending time at school. They did not feel their child worried about school. Though they felt their children could read, write, and spell independently, they did not view them as good readers, writers, and spellers. Their children did not think homework was important and did not often talk about school, as is indicated in item 10 of
Figure 4.

An observation checklist was developed by the researchers to reveal student engagement during class activities (Appendix C). Six students from each of the targeted classrooms were selected randomly for observation. Eight behaviors were observed.

In summary, the evidence collected supported the researchers' concern that lack of student motivation interfered with academic growth. Most students surveyed valued learning and had a positive view of their own abilities. However, some negative feelings about time spent at school were revealed. Responses of parents surveyed revealed some different views between second and fourth grade parents. Overall, parents of younger students viewed their child's attitudes and abilities as positive. Parents of the older students perceive a greater mix of positive and negative attitudes and abilities among their children. Results of the writing assessment showed a range of abilities

among students in both grade levels. Most students had a small core of known words for their grade level.

Observations recorded on the behavior checklist showed most students to be involved in the lesson.

Probable Causes of Problem

Many students do not involve themselves in schoolwork because it seems irrelevant to their lives. Such students do not participate; they are inactive learners. Inactive learners miss opportunities to practice basic skills and to increase their competency. Because inactive learners do not set and accomplish goals, they miss the satisfying experience of achievement. Lack of relevance, competence, and success result in unmotivated students.

Geocaris (1997) stated that students need to see the links between the material they are studying and the real world. This element of authenticity helps students make connections with their own experiences. McCombs and Schunk confirmed that "when learners perceive classroom activities as meaningful and relevant, they are more likely to have a positive attitude toward them" (as cited in McTighe, 1997, p.9).

The Carnegie Corporation of New York (1996) stated that many of the nation's young children are already faltering when they enter school and continue to work below their potential through the early grades. Students who have only experienced failure expect failure and avoid further opportunities to fail by withdrawing. Teachers and students lower their expectations resulting in a pattern of underachievement.

Stevens, Werkhoven, & Castelijns (1997) believed the school unintentionally robs students of the opportunity to be responsible for their own learning and development resulting in unengaged, unmotivated children.

Reluctant learners often fail to participate in teacher-assigned tasks. These learners become more involved in the learning process if they have contributed to planning and setting of students' goals (Rogers & Renard, 1999). If these goals are short-term and specific allowing for student success, the natural tendency to pursue challenge most likely will be enhanced (Fulton, 1997).

Several probable causes may affect student motivation. When students enter school with low expectations for learning, they are likely to experience failure due to the avoidance of learning by withdrawing from classroom activities. Students see little relevance between school learning and real life, causing them to be unengaged and unmotivated, not taking responsibility for their own learning. These negative feelings of students lead to inactive learners who experience little success.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Suggested in the literature are several possible causes for lack of student motivation. One recurrent theme addressed the importance of engaging students in their own learning. Unengaged students are caught in a pattern of failure. They are not attracted to schoolwork because it holds little meaning for them personally. Without practical experiences, skills needed to move students through progressive learning stages do not develop. Non-participating students do not experience the satisfying results focused effort can bring to them. To motivate students, their school experiences must follow a pattern of achievement, not failure.

When children do not understand how a subject relates to their lives, they may not care about it. They continue to search for ways in which what is taught makes sense in their daily lives, and then become frustrated as they realize much of what is covered is irrelevant to them. Tests, reports, grades, and projects force them to learn what they do not care about. Motivation can be induced, but the effects are only temporary.

According to Williams and Woods (1997), the challenge for teachers is to demystify the learning process and help students comprehend how their knowledge and daily experiences connect to the curriculum content. Rogers and Renard (1999) cited

several strategies to help students feel that the classroom is a meaningful place to be. Teachers invite students to discover and share ways that the content is relevant to their lives. Based on student interests outside of school, teachers incorporate meaningful activities within all the content areas. Using cross-curricular activities, students begin to gain an understanding of the importance of transferring knowledge. Teachers also brainstorm ways to present content in a pleasant, unique manner. Students are benefited and enriched by having opportunities to display their efforts to others through exhibitions and performances.

Students become more motivated to learn when they have a personal stake in what they are learning. Tomlinson and Kalbfleisch (1998) recommended that students choose from options appropriate to their own level of challenge. One choice leads to more choices as the students take control and become part of the learning circle. According to Pardes (1994) students think about their learning before the task begins in order to see the task in its entirety. During the task, they choose from possible strategies. At completion of the task the students select a way to evaluate their work. The learning circle continues as students take control of their own learning, increasing motivation.

Educators continually strive to find more ways to involve students in planning, making decisions, and solving problems in the classroom. "When students develop insight into their own ways of knowing and learning, they become highly motivated students in the broader sense of the word, thirsty for a greater understanding of the world around them" (Oakes & Wells, 1998, p.39).

Motivation is why students do what they do. When they are not motivated they do not participate. Such inactive learners protect their self-confidence and avoid experiences of incompetence by withdrawing.

Students who work together give each other opportunities for productivity, a sense of purpose, and accomplishment (Rosenberg, McKeon, & McNamara, 1999). Bellanca and Fogarty (1991) described the instructional strategy of cooperative learning as grouping students together to create a more cohesive classroom. Self-esteem, individual achievement, responsibility, higher-level thinking, and positive attitudes promote student motivation. Cooperative learning enables students to give and receive help from their fellow students, which may lead to higher achievement and less anxiety. They listen to each other's thinking, share their own ideas, and build on their common experiences.

Students can increase their mastery of basic skills by working in cooperative groups. In other words, when students work together over learning tasks, they become more interested in achievement for its own sake rather than working for temporary, external rewards (Joyce & Weil, 1996). When classes are structured to promote interaction and interdependence, students learn more. This collaboration increases transfer of learning. Each group member is held accountable to the group to master all skills and knowledge. The groups are a way of facilitating mastery before the teacher checks individual mastery, through formal or informal assessment (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991).

Students with low self-esteem are hampered by feelings of incompetence. Temporary failures make them feel like permanent losers. In cooperative learning, peer

encouragement is a basic component. Cooperation increases positive feelings toward one another and increases self-esteem through the feeling of being respected and cared for by others. The students' capacity to work productively with others is also increased (Joyce & Weil, 1996).

Cooperative learning also develops a sense of responsibility in students. As students are assigned roles, they realize the group is dependent on them just as they are dependent on the group. According to Costa, Bellanca, and Fogarty (1992), as students' responsibility increases, so does their enthusiasm for learning and retention of knowledge. Students become more personally and socially responsible and learning becomes more enjoyable.

When students are actively engaged in learning, they feel challenged. As students experience curiosity and wonderment, they search intensely for patterns and connections. Some critical tools to challenge and engage the brain are the three-story intellect, higher-order questioning, interactive dialogue, and providing wait time for student responses (Fogarty, 1997). There is no better way to actively involve students in their own learning then by giving them a challenging problem to solve.

Hearing how others approach and analyze problems in a cooperative group gives each student a large repertoire of learning strategies (Turner & Meyer, 2000). Through group discussions, responses and questions are exchanged and thinking is enhanced for both the speaker and the listener. Awareness of various methods of problem solving used by members of a group adds to a student's range of thinking skills.

When a student's ideas are validated by the group, a sense of belonging and a belief in one's competence is greatly enhanced. Students see effort as an investment rather than a risk, and are willing to be active participants in the learning environment. Lumsden (1994) asserted, "Because the potential payoff; having students who value learning for its own sake is priceless, it is crucial for parents, teachers, and school leaders to devote themselves fully to engendering, maintaining, and rekindling students' motivation to learn" (p.92).

Turner and Meyer (2000) stated that students engage willingly when they have something meaningful to contribute. They are treated like partners in the learning endeavor; they express more interest, take more responsibility, and are more interested in self-improvement through evaluation. Goals can be set in the areas of content, skills, and personal development (Merenbloom, 1991).

When students are involved in setting individual and classroom goals, on-task behavior and attentiveness are influenced and improved. Students have an actual sense that there is a good probability for success and their efforts will be worthwhile. Students are more likely to achieve and less likely to experience self-defeat when they have an active role in setting specific learning goals.

Teachers with vision create environments that value the student's potential for learning and creativity. Goals represent well thought out visions which invite action (Williams, 1996). Goals allow students to compare anticipated results with the results that were actually achieved. Risk taking and honest mistakes are allowed. In this

reflection there is no such thing as failure, rather personal insight is gained from one's work experience (Costa & Kallick, 2000).

Bellanca & Fogarty (1991) indicated that goals which are designed and assessed by students become authentic and meaningful to the student. The authenticity of the assessment process increases as students use different means to reflect on the self-directed process and production. Assessments such as portfolios, journals, conferences, and rubrics will help them to make sense of what they are learning.

Portfolios are similar to a photograph album showing student growth over time. According to Rosenberg, McKeon, and McNamara (1999), students set goals, track progress, evaluate their performance, and celebrate their accomplishments. This documentation shows the changes in performance through all stages of a project.

The purpose of student reflective journals is to promote the habit of thinking about their experiences. Researchers recommend using journaling on a daily basis (Costa & Kallick, 2000).

Conferences offer a chance for personal communication which clarify a student's own way of thinking. Interaction between teacher and student provides a unique opportunity to discuss expectations, standards, and quality of work (Kallick, 1992). Conferences pinpoint student progress and promote the setting of future goals.

Solomon wrote, "Rubrics are guidelines that measure degrees of quality" (as cited in Burke, 1998, p.9). The use of rubrics involves looking at samples and determining criteria of successful products or performances.

When students learn to gauge and pace their own progress, they value their own successes as well as their failures. They begin to see goals as progressive steps along the journey to knowledge.

Because students should not be motivated solely by a desire to please the teacher, what researchers need to address is how to match the content of the curriculum and the concerns of the child. The researchers selected various strategies such as pen-pal letters, writing for a student newspaper, and sending letters to children magazines for publication to foster these connections and make learning more meaningful. Relevancy can make the difference between shallow classroom learning and internalized knowledge that applies to everyday life.

Students' motivation will be increased when they feel confident and competent. The researchers selected those strategies least threatening to students and helped them apply skills that demonstrate mastery of learning. As students experience success they will willingly accept new challenges.

Fulton (1997) stated, "Intrinsic motivation is defined as a natural tendency to pursue goals because of the love of the challenge, and the self-directed goal-setting to solve these challenges" (p.8). The researchers will give students the opportunity to set and work toward goals increasing self-expectations and decreasing underachievement. As a result, these motivated students should be able to live more resilient, productive, and satisfying lives.

Project Objectives and Processes

Taking into consideration the many strategies available from which to design an effective plan of action to promote change among elementary students, members of this

research team concluded that their approach would encompass a combination of diverse strategies. Teachers would instruct students in each of the following: cross-curricular activities, cooperative learning strategies, and teacher designed activities to involve students in goal setting.

As a result of cross-curricular activities taught by the classroom teachers during the period from September 2000 through December 2000, the targeted elementary students will increase their use of basic spelling strategies in a variety of settings as measured by teacher made rubrics, spelling assessments, student surveys, and observations. In order to accomplish this objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Implement direct instruction of strategies
2. Develop a series of meaningful writing activities
3. Utilize a rubric to assess basic skills in student writing

As a result of the use of cooperative learning in the elementary classroom during the period from September 2000 through December 2000, the targeted students will develop effective interpersonal relationships as measured by observation checklists and student reflections. In order to accomplish this objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Utilize cooperative learning techniques
2. Develop a series of activities that maintain a high level of student involvement
3. Design an observation checklist to assess individual involvement within groups

As a result of teacher designed activities for student goal setting during the period from September 2000 through December 2000, the targeted elementary classes will increase their motivation to achieve personal and academic goals as measured by reflective journals, portfolios, and observation checklists. In order to accomplish this objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Schedule individual student-teacher conferences to establish goals
2. Encourage student progress toward setting goals with frequent teacher feedback
3. Utilize student portfolio to show evidence of progress

Action Plan for the Intervention

In order to achieve the project objectives for increasing student motivation researchers will develop and implement the following action plan.

Week 1-

Introduction to class
Send letter home to parents
Discuss project with class
Introduce portfolios (Student chosen work/Teacher chosen work
Administer student motivation survey

Week 2-

Compile results of student survey
Use observation checklist
Send parent survey home
Teach lesson on the writing process
Direct student writing of first penpal letter
Administer rubric
Set goals with students

Week 3-

Introduce/explain cooperative learning groups
Compile results of parent survey
Start word-pair cooperative groups
Introduce spelling tiles
Facilitate student story writing

Weeks 4 through14-

Facilitate student writing of story/letter
Assign spelling tiles work
Assign work-pair cooperative groups
Administer rubric
Use observation checklist
Compile spelling list with students
Assign spelling choice activities

Week 5-

Distribute teacher surveys
Teach reflection writing
Graph number of words missed on weekly spelling tests so far

Week 6-

Compile teacher survey results
Check with music teacher on transfer of spelling words
Assign reflection writing
Graph number of words missed on weekly spelling test

Week 7-

Assign reflection writing
Graph words missed on weekly spelling test

Week 8 –

Discuss goals with individual students
Assign reflection writing
Graph words missed on weekly spelling test

Week 9-

Discuss goals with individual students
Assign reflection writing
Graph words missed on weekly spelling test

Week 10-

Check with music teacher on transfer of spelling words
Send home grade results
Assign reflection writing
Graph words missed on weekly spelling test

Week 11-

Assign reflection writing
Graph words missed on weekly spelling test

Week 12-

Publish newspaper based on student writings and cooperative group work
Assign reflection writing
Graph words missed on weekly spelling test

Week 13-

Assign reflection writing
Graph words missed on weekly spelling test
Check goals with individual students

Week 14-

Re-administer student motivation survey
Re-administer parent survey
Check goals with individual students
Graph words missed on weekly spelling test
Assign reflection writing

Week 15-

Compile results of surveys
Meet with researchers involved to discuss results of 15 week project
Check with music teacher on transfer of spelling words
Discuss graphs of words missed on weekly spelling tests
Assign reflection writing

Methods of Assessment

In order to determine the effects of this project the following assessments will be completed: the researchers will analyze student surveys and basic skills rubrics will be utilized to measure competence. Researchers will design an observation checklist for

the assessment of student involvement in cooperative activities. Students will also provide a portfolio to researchers as a working document, which will reflect student progress.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objectives of the project were to increase the targeted students' motivation and positive attitudes toward school and to improve academic performance. Attitudes were measured by parent and student surveys. Student performance was measured by observation checklists, a written assessment of each student's core of known words for writing, and entries in teacher journals.

Prior to this investigation, spelling instruction was based on the district textbook. Spelling work focused on accurately completing workbook pages. Spelling assessment was a posttest checking for memorization of a weekly list.

Researchers provided cross-curricular activities for targeted second and fourth grade students, giving them opportunities to practice and use spelling strategies. Each student communicated regularly through letters with a pen pal. Spelling strategies were attended to in the writing activities of other academic subjects such as social studies and reading. The music teacher used rhythmic and singing activities to enhance spelling instruction in the classroom.

Researchers eliminated the use of a spelling workbook. Weekly word lists were the focus for direct instruction of spelling patterns and strategies. Student-centered activities provided spelling practice. Social skills for cooperative group work were taught so students were prepared to work in small groups or pairs. The process of reflection was modeled and practiced and teacher conferences provided opportunities for individual reflection and goal setting (Appendix D). Student portfolios were created for reflections, graphs of weekly progress (Appendices E and F), and writing samples.

The researchers introduced the project to parents and students and established and compiled base line data during the first three weeks of implementation. A written assessment was given to each student to establish his or her core of known words for writing. The first observation checklist was administered to a random sample of targeted students in grades two and four. This random sample group was used throughout the project to monitor engagement and motivation. Researchers began instruction of the writing process in preparation of pen pal correspondence with a neighboring school. Teachers explained the importance of writing with a purpose, giving ample opportunities to use words in all content areas. Teachers created rubrics, which were utilized to score individual writing samples beginning in week three (Appendices G, H, and I). The teachers involved in this study also met with students in a conference setting to introduce portfolios and establish individual goals.

After introducing spelling tiles in week three (Appendix J), researchers allowed time for students to manipulate and experience word patterns as one of the choice activities. A new choice activity was introduced weekly to add to the children's repertoire of available options. These included paper/pencil exercises, games, slates, puzzles, word recognition, art activities, and creative writings covering the range of multiple intelligences. Spelling bees were held. Researchers monitored activities to assure active participation by all students. Students were allowed to complete these activities individually, in work pairs, or in small cooperative groups.

Reflective writing by the students continued to need teacher assistance. By week five researchers modeled more detailed reflections and encouraged the transition from oral to written reflection. At this time students began to graph weekly test results to monitor progress. This was a concrete representation of their progress in relation to their personal goals.

Aside from choice activities, and in keeping with the cross-curricular approach, students were exposed to spelling activities in the music program. Spelling patterns were correlated to melodic and rhythmic patterns, which were identified in songs and used to write new songs. Students were given opportunities to use their spelling words in an unexpected and enjoyable way.

By the end of week five, researchers from the regular classroom and the music program were sharing observations. The teachers involved did not feel surveying the entire staff was applicable to this project; therefore this survey was omitted. Teachers also felt it was too early in the project for a second

administration of the observation checklist. It was postponed to a later week. Researchers altered their original plan for graphing weekly spelling test results. Focusing the graph on the number of words missed had a negative connotation. Focusing instead on number of words correct and weekly improvement seemed a more positive approach.

By week six, choice-activities, student goal setting, and graphing, as well as student reflection was ongoing and became established as the weekly routine. Classroom teachers and the music teacher continued to discuss cross-curricular transfer of spelling strategies. The observation checklist was utilized for the second time in week eight. During week ten, parent-teacher conferences were held to discuss student progress.

The exchange of pen-pal letters was becoming less frequent than originally planned due to holidays, testing, and variances in schedules between the two schools involved. The original plan for publishing a student newspaper was prohibited by time constraints during week twelve. Researchers sought other opportunities to do purposeful student writing for public presentation. Articles were submitted for publication in the local newspaper and various educational contests, with many being published. Other opportunities included letters of appreciation to field trip sources and submissions to a poetry anthology.

The re-administering of student and parent surveys planned for week 14 was moved to week 15. Researchers preferred completing all weeks of the project before gathering final data. The observation checklist was administered for the third time, and the final timed writing was completed to establish each

student's current core of known words. Researchers compiled and discussed all results at the completion of week fifteen.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, researchers readministered the student and parent surveys. Three observations of class behavior on the part of six students chosen at random from each of the targeted grade levels were compiled. A final timed writing to establish each student's core of known words was given.

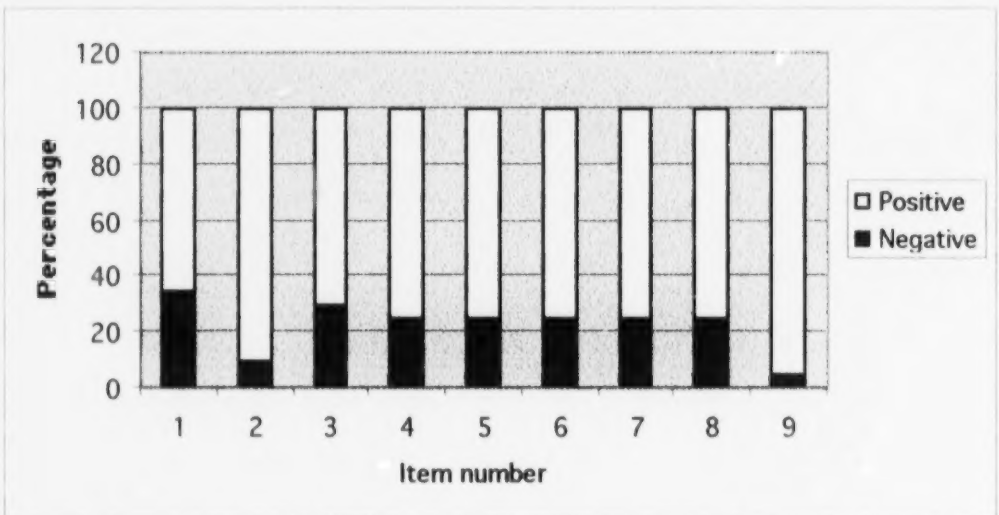

Figure 5. Student responses from Grade 2 indicating personal views on school and learning capabilities.

The second grade student survey results shown in Figure 5 display an improvement in their feelings about school and their own learning capabilities. Two areas which showed significant increases were student views of their own reading ability compared to their peers, evident in item number 3, and student

views of spending time at school, shown in item 6. The greatest positive increase was the students' view of the importance of learning, as is shown in item 9.

The fourth grade student survey results as shown in Figure 6 demonstrate a continuation of positive feelings toward school and their learning capabilities. Item 6 of the survey shows a noticeable increase occurred in their view of school as a place to spend time. A dramatic increase occurred in the students' view of their ability to answer questions asked by the teacher as manifested in item 7.

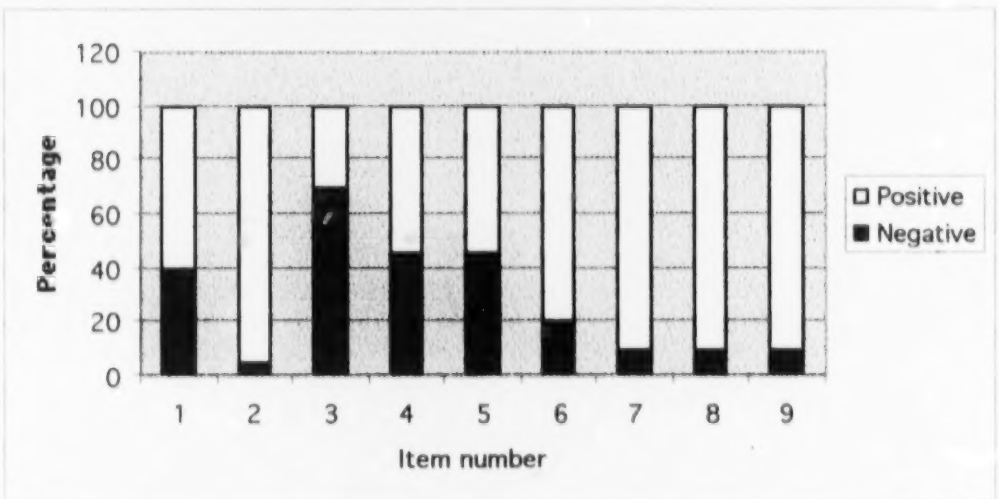

Figure 6. Student responses from Grade 4 indicating personal views on school and learning capabilities.

Parents surveyed from the targeted second grade class responded in an overall positive manner, although to a lesser degree. One area showed a large positive increase, reporting in item number 10 that their child talks about school more often in the home. Results of the survey are displayed in Figure 7.

Positive responses on fourth grade parent surveys as shown in Figure 8 increased in every area. The more noticeable changes occurred in parent views of their child as a writer and their child's view of school and homework, exhibited in items numbered 3 and 8. There was an extreme increase in student willingness to talk about school at home, mirrored in item 10 of the parent responses from the targeted second grade class.

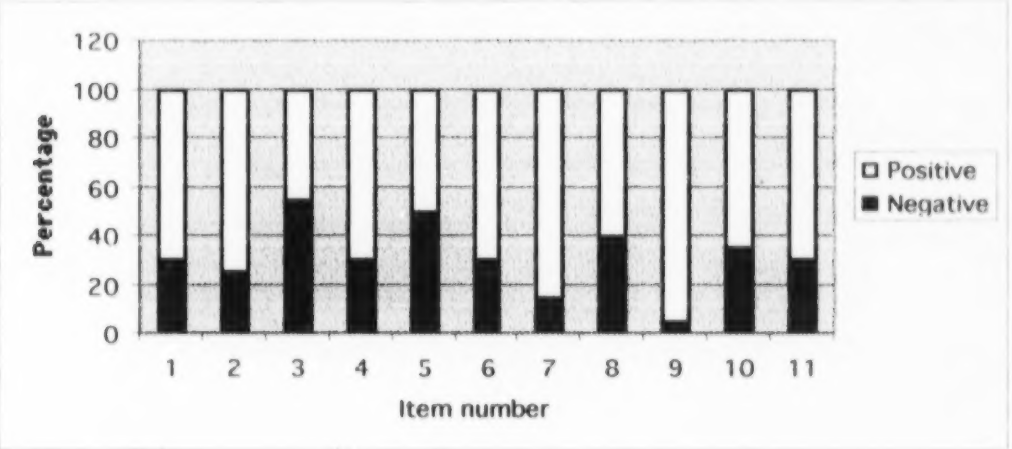

Figure 7. Parent survey responses of 2nd grade students in December, 2000.

A comparison was made of student behavior, observed and recorded during the project in the months of September, October and December. Second grade observation checklist results are shown in Figure 9, and fourth grade results in Figure 10. Overall, students in both targeted grade levels demonstrated an increased involvement in lessons. Both classes showed a particular gain in student time spent on-task with the lesson, when comparing the first observation

with the final observation in December. Researchers noticed a decrease in uninvolved behavior such as restlessness, idleness, speaking out, and interfering with the learning of others in the class.

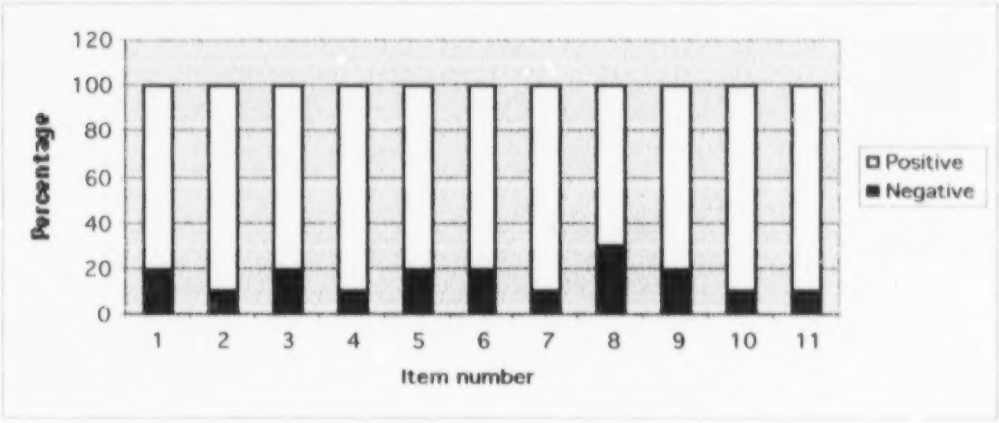

Figure 8. Parent survey responses of 4th grade students in December,2000.

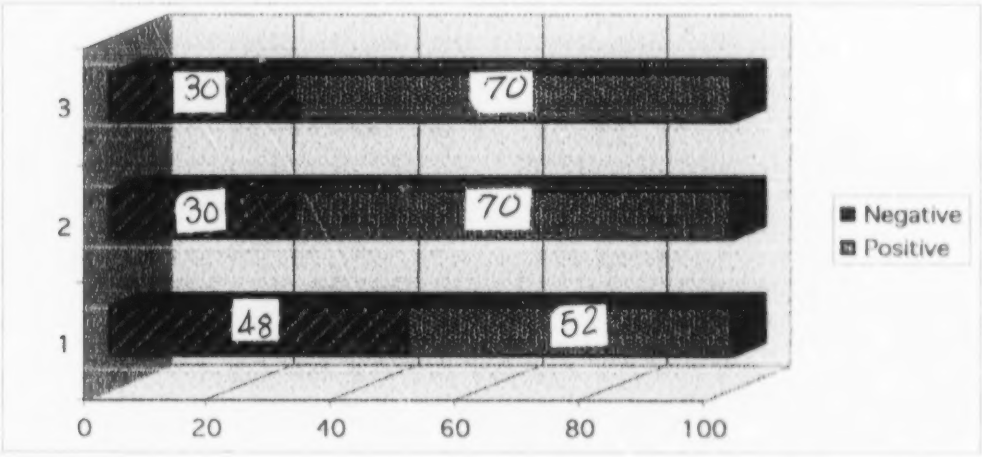

Figure 9. Teacher observations of targeted 2nd grade students

At the start of the project in September researchers administered a timed-writing assessment, giving students from both targeted classes 10 minutes to list

words they believed they could spell correctly. General prompts were given to assist the children before and during the assessment, such as names, things, animals, and any words known by sight. Researchers tabulated each student's list of words that were written and spelled correctly. Timed writing results are displayed in Figures 11 and 12, which show a significant increase in the accuracy and amount of words each student could list when reassessed at the conclusion of this intervention in December. Results from the second grade exhibited a low of 3 correct words listed by a student in September and 35 words for the same student in December. The greatest number of words a student could spell accurately was 44 in September and 128 in December.

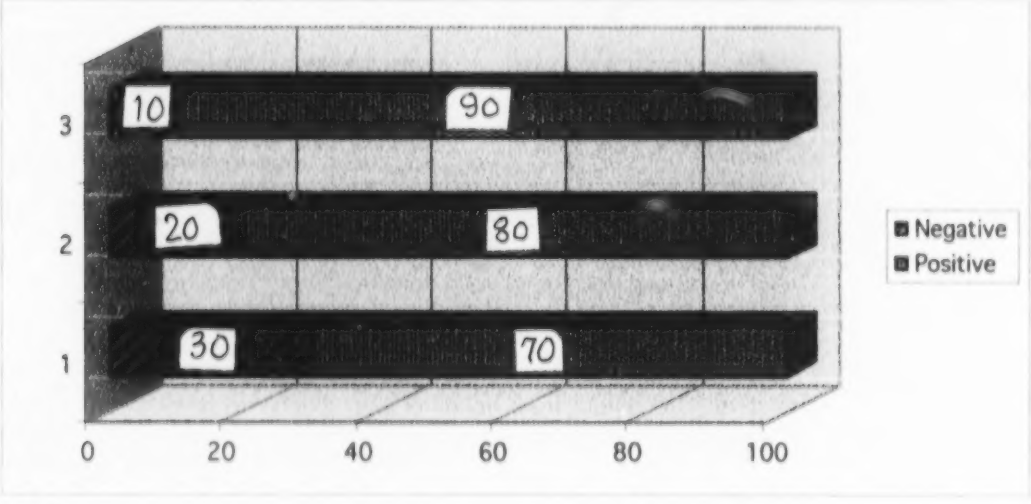

Figure 10. Teacher observations of targeted 4th grade students.

Researchers recorded similar results in the timed writing assessments of the targeted fourth grade class. The end of the project showed an increase in accurately spelled words. No student wrote fewer than 10 words in September

and no fewer than 36 words in December. In September, the greatest number of words written was 69 and 129 words in December.

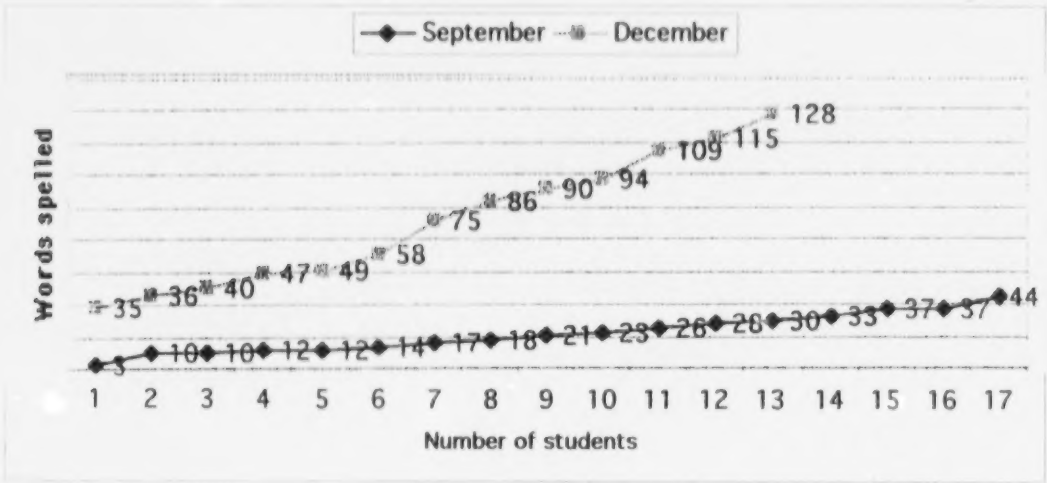

Figure 11. Timed writing assessment results from targeted second grade class.

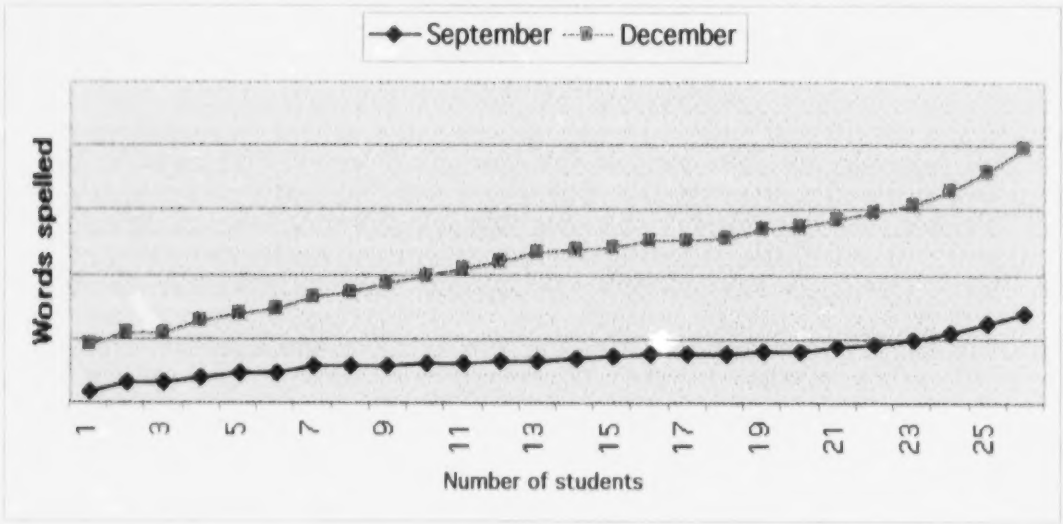

Figure 12. Timed writing assessment results from targeted 4th grade class.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

Examination of the presented data indicates increased student motivation demonstrated by changes in student engagement and academic growth. Results of parent and student surveys as well as teacher observations of classroom behavior illustrated a positive trend. Timed writing scores increased.

The project was enthusiastically welcomed when students clapped and cheered upon learning that no spelling books would be used. Student thinking could be seen and heard as group work began, allowing interaction and conversation where ideas were verbalized. Students began encouraging each other as they worked.

Students willingly and easily made work selections. The choice activities offered at school transferred to home as parents reported changes in how the weekly spelling list was being practiced at home. Positive comments from parents were specific to class procedures such as the use of spelling buddies, indicating that students were talking about class at home.

In writing activities students were conscious of using the spelling strategies taught by the researchers in this project. Independent use of resources such as a dictionary and thesaurus increased, as students became confident of their ability to spell well enough to locate information. Even low achievers became risk-takers, willing to try extra or difficult words because they could see the possibility of being right rather than the certainty of being wrong. The weekly graphing of test results, which students eagerly anticipated, supported this

confidence. Unsolicited verbal reflections accompanied this graphing, as students looked at concrete evidence of their personal progress. Less successful weeks were viewed as temporary when seen in perspective to the entire graph.

Researchers feel this project had a positive motivational and academic effect on the targeted students. They recommend future use of instruction that is relevant to each student's needs, makes use of cooperative learning, and allows for individual goal setting and reflection as evidence of personal progress. Researchers recommend starting such spelling instruction on or about the third week of the term, allowing time for students and teachers to socially acclimate to a new school year. Also, baseline data collected would be more reflective of true student ability. Thought should be given to the creation of a new observation checklist, which would be more specific to positive and negative behaviors and easier to interpret.

The researchers expect that motivation will remain a chronic concern. Because student involvement is neither constant nor predictable, teachers must continually and consciously address it. "... to capture student motivation, the effective teacher must reveal as many different appeals as possible in any given lesson" (Rinne, 1998, p.620). Therefore, motivational instruction must be delivered by enthusiastic teachers offering meaningful student choices, helping them discern connections between school work and life experiences and inculcating in each student a sense of self-satisfaction and pride.

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Appendix A

Student Motivation Profile

1. My friends think I am...
   _____ a poor reader
   _____ an OK reader
   _____ a good reader
   _____ a very good reader

2. Reading a book is something I like to do...
   _____ never
   _____ not very often
   _____ sometimes
   _____ often

3. I read...
   _____ not as well as my friends.
   _____ about the same as my friends
   _____ a little better than my friends
   _____ a lot better than my friends

4. I am...
   _____ a poor reader
   _____ an OK reader
   _____ a good reader
   _____ a very good reader

5. I am...
   _____ a poor speller
   _____ an OK speller
   _____ a good speller
   _____ a very good speller

6. I think school is...
   _____ a boring place to spend time
   _____ an OK place to spend time
   _____ an interesting place to spend time
   _____ a great place to spend time

7. When my teacher asks me a question, I...
   _____ can never think of an answer
   _____ have trouble thinking of an answer
   _____ sometimes think of an answer
   _____ always think of an answer

8. I worry about what other students think about my grades…
   ____ every day
   ____ almost every day
   ____ once in a while
   ____ never

9. I think learning is…
   ____ dumb
   ____ OK
   ____ important
   ____ very important

Appendix B

Parent Survey-Motivation

1. I think my child is…
   ____ a poor reader
   ____ an OK reader
   ____ a good reader
   ____ a very good reader

2. Reading independently is something my child likes to do…
   ____ never
   ____ not very often
   ____ sometimes
   ____ often

3. I think my child is…
   ____ a poor writer
   ____ an OK writer
   ____ a good writer
   ____ a very good writer

4. Writing independently is something my child likes to do…
   ____ never
   ____ not very often
   ____ sometimes
   ____ often

5. I think my child is…
   ____ a poor speller
   ____ an OK speller
   ____ a good speller
   ____ a very good speller

6. Spelling independently is something my child likes to do…
   ____ never
   ____ not very often
   ____ sometimes
   ____ often

7. My child thinks school is…
   ____ a boring place to spend time
   ____ an OK place to spend time
   ____ an interesting place to spend time
   ____ a great place to spend time

Appendix B (continued)

8. My child thinks homework is…
   ____ dumb
   ____ OK
   ____ important
   ____ very important

9. My child thinks learning is…
   ____ dumb
   ____ OK
   ____ important
   ____ very important

10. My child talks about school…
    ____ every day
    ____ almost every day
    ____ once in a while
    ____ never

11. My child worries about school…
    ____ every day
    ____ almost every day
    ____ once in a while
    ____ never

Appendix C

Observation Checklist

Observation Checklist on Student Motivation					
Student Name:					
Observation Dates	observe#1	observe#2	observe#3	observe#4	observe#5
1. Stays on task					
2. Involved in lesson					
3. Raises hand					
4. Stares off into space					
5. Speaks out					
6. Bothers others					
7. Not working					
8. Squirms in seat					
9. Gets out of seat					

Appendix D

Student Goal Setting

Student Name:

Week	Pre-test	Goal	Score	Outcome
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				

*E= Exceeded goal

M= Met goal

D= Did not meet goal

Appendix E

Second Grade Student Spelling Graph

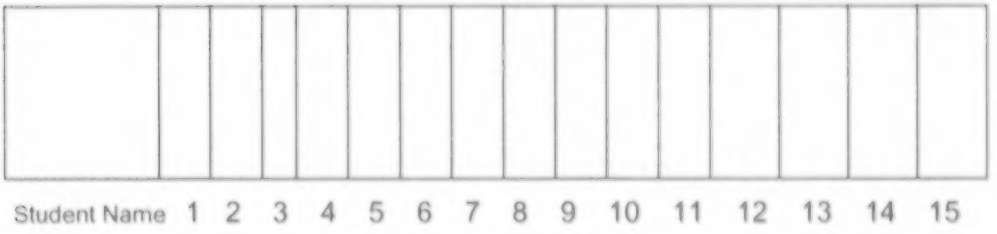
*Star in box= 100% on test

→ = grade is same as week before

↑ = improved grade from week before

↓ = lower grade than week before

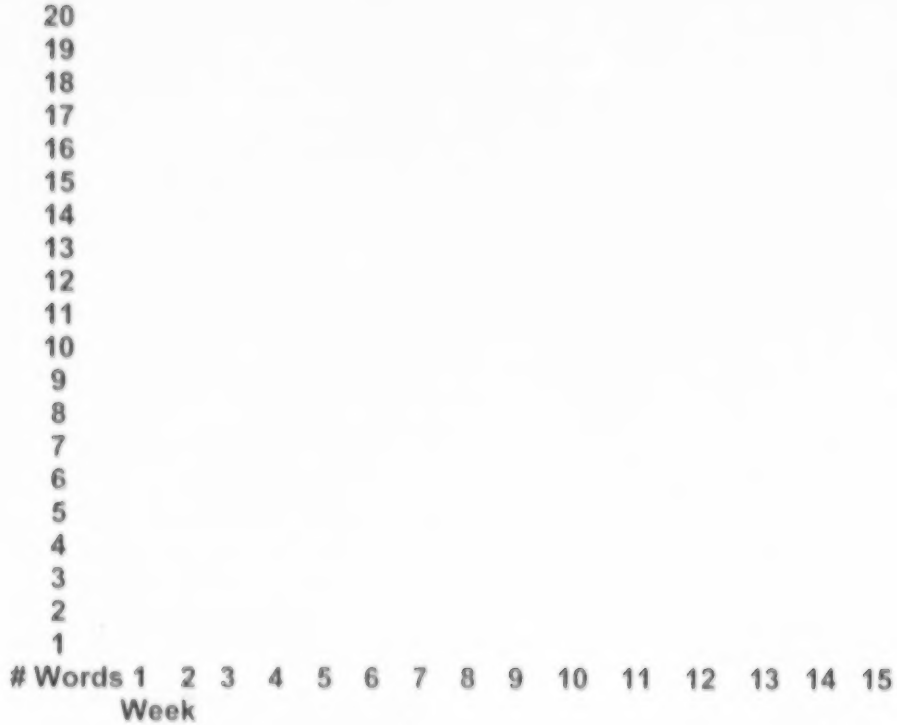
+ = number of words mastered beyond the basic list



Appendix F

Grade 4 Student Spelling Graph

Student Name: _____



Appendix G

Grade 2 Spelling Rubric

SPELLING
Copy correctly and check
*Known word
or work-like
Meaningful
Attempt of unknown
WRITING
Letter formation
And size
**Letter direction
Write-overs
SPACING
Within word
Between words

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

* known means current or past spelling word or element

** NO reversals

0= Never
1= Less than 1/2 of time
2= More than 1/2 of time
3= Always

Student Name_____ _____

Appendix H
Grade 4 Writing/Spelling Rubrics

Rubric: Grade 4 Haiku

1- first line has five syllables
2- second line has seven syllables
3- third line has five syllables
4- a season is stated or implied
5- the haiku states or implies where it takes place
6- the haiku includes weather, a bird, an animal, a flower, plant (something about nature)
7- the haiku implies when it takes place
8- accurate spelling

Criteria:

1-3 items: Doesn't meet
4-6 items: Meets
7-8 items: Exceeds expectations

Pen-Pal Rubric

Points:
6= Parts of a letter
5= Correct spelling
4= Capital letters
3= Punctuation
2= Paragraph form
1= Neatness

Appendix I
Social Studies Writing Rubric

Essay Question for Chapter 7:

Write a paragraph giving three reasons why the Northeast is important to people all over the United States.

Points:

1 point- indented paragraph
1 point- capital letters at the beginnings of sentences
1 point- introduction sentence
3 points- reasons NE is important
1 point – closing sentence
1 point- periods at the ends of sentences
1 point- spelling
1 point- paragraph form
10 points total for paragraph

Appendix J

Spelling Tiles

Letter tiles may be purchased, or made by teachers on 1'" ceramic tiles. Using a permanent marker, write one alphabet letter on each tile. Multiple tiles of the same letter are needed, determined by the words that will be spelled. Vowel letters may be on a different color tile from the consonants, or written with a different color of marker. More lower-case letters are needed than capitals, but both should be provided.

Children manually manipulate the spelling tiles to make words.

Appendix K
Parent Letter

St. Xavier University
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Increasing Student Motivation Through the Use Of Instructional Strategies

August 24, 2000

Dear Parents:

We are currently enrolled in a master's degree program at Saint Xavier University and will be conducting an action research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree. This project will involve some changes in the instructional strategies and some modification of the spelling curriculum. Students in Mrs. Pavelonis' 4th grade and Mrs. Pellouchoud's 2nd grade classrooms will be taking part in this project. The aforementioned students will also have these motivational strategies reinforced through Music in Mrs. Wilson's room.

We as researchers have observed a decline in students' abilities to transfer their work in spelling across the curriculum. Our intention is to motivate these students to carry their spelling skills over to other learning areas.

This research project will take place during the first semester of the 2000-2001 school year, but will possibly continue to year's end based on the project's success. The teachers involved will be implementing motivational strategies such as, cooperative spelling groups, student selected spelling activities, pen-pal writing, submission of student written work for possible publication, and enrichment of these spelling activities through rhythm and music in Mrs. Wilson's classroom.

Parents and students involved in this project will be asked to complete a brief survey or questionnaire regarding their current views on spelling and student motivation. Any responses the students make will not affect their grades in any way, and the project will not interfere with the regular school curriculum and schedule. All results of the project will be confidential, and no students will be identified in any way. Some samples of student work may be displayed at an exhibition of the project next May. There will be no cost or compensation to participants, except for an expected increase in their ability to use spelling skills across the curriculum.

Your child is not required to participate in this project, and you and your child have the right to withdraw from this project at any time. We reserve the right to withdraw your child from participation in the project for any reason. If you have questions or concerns about this project, please call us at the school, 309-792-0639 and we will be happy to address any concerns.

We would greatly appreciate your permission to have your child participate in this project. Please fill out the attached permission slip and return it to us at the school.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Janice Moriarity
Kim Pavelonis
Debbie Pellouchoud
Jeanne Wilson

Permission to Participate

I understand that in the event of physical injury resulting from this research there is no compensation and/or payment from Saint Xavier University for such injury, except as may be required of the University by law.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary; refusal to participate involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. I also understand the investigator has the right to withdraw me from the study at any time.

I acknowledge that the investigator has explained to me the need for this research, identified the risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my participation. I freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand all information gathered during the interview will be completely confidential (or anonymous). I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for my own information.

_____

Child's Name

_____

Signature of Parent

_____

Date